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No.

in the  
**Supreme Court**  
of the  
**United States**

MIKE LEE VIERTHALER,  
KURT ARTHUR VIERTHALER, and  
SCOTT ERRICO

*Petitioners,*

*vs.*

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

*Respondent.*

PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI  
TO THE COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE  
ELEVENTH CIRCUIT

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## **QUESTION PRESENTED**

**21 U.S.C. §955a and b IS OVERLY BROAD, VAGUE, INDEFINITE, AND ABRIDGES SPECIFIC TREATIES THE UNITED STATES HAS RATIFIED WITHOUT EXPRESSLY DECLARING AN INTENTION TO ABROGATE OR MODIFY SAID TREATIES.**

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**To: The Honorable Chief Justice and Associate Justices  
of the Supreme Court of the United States.**

Petitioners, Mike Lee Vierthaler, Kurt Arthur Vierthaler and Scott Errico, pray a Writ of Certiorari issue to review a final judgment of the Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit affirming their conviction in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida.

## **JUDGMENT AND OPINION OF THE COURT BELOW**

**In a per curiam non-published opinion, the Court of Appeals affirmed the Petitioners' convictions.**

### **JURISDICTION OF THIS COURT**

**This Petition is filed within sixty (60) days of the Court of Appeals denial of the Petitioner's petition for rehearing on October 14, 1982.**

**The jurisdiction of this Court is invoked, made and conferred under Title 28 U.S.C. §1254(1) and Rules 17 through 23 of this Court's rules.**

### **CONSTITUTIONAL ARTICLES, AMENDMENTS, STATUTES, AND TREATIES INVOLVED**

**First, Fourth, Fifth and Ninth Amendments;**

**Article I; United States Constitution**

**21 U.S.C. §955 Convention on the High Seas (1958)**

## **STATEMENT OF THE CASE**

The Petitioners were convicted after a bench trial of one count of possession of marijuana with the intent to distribute in violation of 21 U.S.C. §955a and 18 U.S.C. §2. On appeal they challenged the constitutionality of 21 U.S.C. §955a which was denied in a non-published opinion.

## **REASONS FOR GRANTING THE WRIT**

In 1980 Congress enacted 21 U.S.C. §955a for the purpose of assisting the United States Coast Guard in its enforcement of the laws relating to the importation of controlled substances. The Senate Report stated the Statute would give the Justice Department the maximum prosecutorial authority permitted under International Law.

The Statute unnecessarily infringes upon the constitutional right of freedom of association guaranteed by the First Amendment. The Statute is overly broad prohibiting conduct which Congress does not have the legislative power to punish. The Statute conflicts or abridges a specific Treaty ratified by the United States; however, the Statute does not expressly state an intention to abrogate or modify said Treaty.

Subsection (a) of the Statute does not limit its applicability to persons intending to distribute the controlled substance within the United States. A person, whether a United States citizen, or alien on board a "vessel of the United States" or on a "vessel subject to the jurisdiction of the United States" may be prosecuted

even though the intended distribution point is a foreign jurisdiction, even if the substance is legal in the foreign jurisdiction.

Subsection (b) of the Statute prohibits a United States citizen from being on board any vessel containing a controlled substance, even though the intended distribution point is a foreign jurisdiction where such substance is legal.

Subsection (c) of the Statute prohibits the possession of any controlled substance on any vessel within the customs waters of the United States even if the vessel and the cargo are destined for a foreign jurisdiction where possession of said substance is legal.

Subsection (d) of the Statute prohibits any person, whether a United States citizen or alien, from possessing or manufacturing a controlled substance anywhere in the world, even though said act does not have a *present* effect within the territory of the United States.

All of the aforementioned subsections are intended to reach acts committed outside the territorial jurisdiction of the United States. Persons are subject to the Statute even though they have acted solely extraterritorially and even though their acts have no *present* effect within the United States.

The definitional section, 21 U.S.C. §955b is vague and indefinite. Subsection (c) which defines the term "vessel of the United States" is overly broad. The Statute states that a vessel owned by a United States citizen, in whole or in part, or a corporation within the



laws of the United States, shall be considered a vessel of the United States, even though it flies the flag of a foreign country unless the vessel has been granted nationality by a foreign nation in accordance with Article 5 of the Convention on the High Seas (1958). The Statute allows the United States to exercise jurisdiction over a foreign-flag vessel granted nationality by a foreign nation, if it has not done so in accordance with Article 5 of the Convention on the High Seas (1958). All the nations of the world have not signed or ratified the Convention on the High Seas (1958). Failure to sign or ratify the Convention does not authorize the United States to exercise jurisdiction over vessels of those countries who have not signed or ratified the Convention.

Subsection (d) of the 955b provides that a vessel without nationality is subject to the jurisdiction of the United States. A foreign national aboard a vessel without nationality, who possesses a controlled substance with the intent to distribute it in a foreign jurisdiction wherein the substance is lawful is subject to prosecution pursuant to §955a(a).

The Statute abridges or conflicts with the Convention on the High Seas (1958) which regulates the jurisdiction of war ships (i.e., Coast Guard vessels) on the high seas. Under Article 11, Clause 2 of the Constitution, treaties are a part of the supreme law of the land. Congress has the power to abrogate or modify a treaty by a subsequent treaty or statute. However, if Congress intends to abrogate or modify a treaty by statute, that intention should be clearly and expressly set forth.

Nowhere within the language of the Statute, nor within its legislative history, does Congress express an

intention to abrogate or modify the Convention on the High Seas (1958). In fact, Congress referred to portions of the Convention in the definitional section of the Statute.

21 U.S.C. §955a conflicts with the Convention in the following respect. Article 2 of the Convention states that the high seas are open to all nations and no state may validly purport to subject any part of them to its sovereignty. The Convention provides that United States warships may interfere with foreign merchant ships where (1) the foreign ship is engaged in piracy, or (2) the foreign ship is engaged in the slave trade, or (3) the foreign ship is in reality the same nationality as the war ship. The Statute permits a broader range of search and seizure by the United States Coast Guard than the three exceptions specified by the Convention.

The Petitioner's cause should be joined with that raised by the Petitioner in *United States v. Esteban Marino-Garcia* who filed for certiorari before this Court on November 6, 1982.

## CONCLUSION

The constitutionality of 21 U.S.C. §955a and §955b is a matter of great public importance because it has extended the arm of United States law enforcement without regard for International law or our prior treaty obligations.

Respectfully submitted,

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